



Eucalyptus parramattensis (Calgaroo)

CALGAROO

Volume 38, No 2, February 2011

Newsletter of the Parramatta and Hills District Group
Australian Plants Society NSW Ltd

February Meeting – Queensland Orchids Friday, 25 Feb

David Banks, who will be the speaker at our February meeting, is recognised as an international expert and speaker on Orchids. He recently searched for orchids in North Queensland and has prepared a new PowerPoint presentation.

David points out that these orchids grow high in the Ranges and can be grown in Sydney more easily than on the coast in the Cairns area.

Meetings are held in Barton Hall, Anglican Retirement Villages, David Road, Castle Hill at 8pm on 4th Friday



Orchids - Photo: Chris Coe

Myrtle Rust

Myrtle Rust has been made a notifiable pest, which means that by law, you are required to report Myrtle Rust within 24 hours after first discovering or becoming aware of its appearance. Call the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline 1800 084 881. This was

copied from <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/plant/myrtle-rust>

Myrtle Rust is distinctive in that it produces masses of powdery bright yellow or orange-yellow spores on infected plant parts although in its early stages it can look like a light fawn or grey mist over the plant. It infects leaves of susceptible plants producing spore-filled lesions on young actively growing leaves, shoots, flower buds and fruits. Leaves may become buckled or twisted and may die as a result of infection. Sometimes these infected spots are surrounded by a purple ring. Older lesions may contain dark brown spores. Infection on highly susceptible plants may result in plant death.



Myrtle Rust infected tree

Jeff Howes, well known member of North Shore Group, reports that his *Austromyrtus lasioclada* (Velvety myrtle) plant has been stricken with Myrtle Rust and has been totally removed from his garden. See his essential treatment – no half measures, detailed on page 2.

And please be careful if you walk in the bush!



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Librarian

Supper Hostess

Your help will be appreciated!

Calendar

Feb 2011

Fri 25 Group Meeting at 8pm – *Native Orchids* with David Banks

Mar 2011

Wed 9 Propagation at Bidjiwong Community Nursery at 10.00am

Fri 11 Deadline for *Calgaroo* news / articles

Fri 25 Group Meeting at 8pm – *Myrtle Rust* with Jonathan Lidbetter

Apr 2011

Mon 11 Deadline for *Calgaroo* news / articles

Wed 13 Propagation at Bidjiwong Community Nursery at 10.00am

May 2011

Mon 9 Deadline for *Calgaroo* news / articles

Wed 11 Propagation at Bidjiwong Community Nursery at 10.00am

Fri 25 Group Meeting at 8pm – *Native Ferns* with Kyrill Taylor

Supper Host/Hostess

We need a Supper Host/Hostess! Sue Gibbons has offered to attend to supper at our 25 Feb meeting but thereafter we need someone. Sue tells me that our supper cup holders, paper cups, spoons, sugar and bowl are kept in the cupboard and supplies are purchased as required. Only milk must be purchased for each meeting. Costs will be reimbursed. It is customary to have a few members bring a plate of goodies.

If we are unable to find a Supper Host/Hostess our only option will be to ask those whose names start with particular letters to share a once a year turn with others having names starting with the same letters. It is not too late to offer now.

Next Meeting -- Friday, 25 Mar at 8.00pm

Jonathan Lidbetter, a former member of our Group and a Research Officer, Forest and Rangeland Ecosystems, NSW Dept of Industry and Investment, will speak about the recent outbreak of **Myrtle Rust** which is threatening plants in the Myrtaceae Family.

MYRTLE RUST CLEAN-UP

Jeff Howes

The officers from the Department of Industry and Investment (previously the Department of Agriculture) advise:

- Cut all the foliage off and place it in sealed plastic bags;
- Leave these bags in the sun for a few weeks and dispose of them in the garbage and not the green waste bin;
- Dig the stump out (I could not but have treated it with neat Glyphosate);
- Treat the surrounding soil and mulch (out to the drip line) with a multi-purpose fungicide;
- Clean all tools used with Methylated Spirits or similar;
- Hope it has not spread to any other plants.

Call the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline 1800 084 881 if you see anything that may be Myrtle Rust! It is better to report it than find out later it was and you didn't.

2010 Library Report

Sue Gibbons

A library stocktake was undertaken at the beginning of 2010. It took a number of months to check the books, ie sort, catalogue, cull and chase up long overdue loans.

Over 40 books were donated to the library. These were covered in plastic, catalogued and added to the shelves. Thank you to members who donated the books.

Due to the uncertain nature of the Group's viability no new books were purchased.

During the stocktake period a number of books were culled and then posted to Tony Cavanagh in APS Victoria. He is in the process of collecting the works of members, eg research articles and books, to form a collection to be housed in the National Library of Australia on behalf of the Australian Native Plants Society Australia (ANPSA).

Some others were taken to Florilegium Books (our Society bookseller) at Glebe. A small amount was raised to add to our funds. The rest of our culled books have been put out at meetings for members to peruse and purchase.

There are still some outstanding loans where previous librarians and I have been unable to locate the borrower.

There are also books listed with a card but unfortunately they are not on the shelves. This means they have been taken without the card being completed as borrowed with the borrower's name, date, etc.

Could you please check your own shelves in case some of the following titles may have strayed your way. The library would be delighted if they came home!

- *Australian Native Plants*, J Wrigley and M Fagg (Book 2);
- *Colour Your Garden with Australian Plants*, G E Elliot;
- *Creating an Australian Garden*, J M Hunt;
- *Cunninghamia*, Vol 1 and Vol 2;
- *Environmental Weeds – A Field Guide for SE Australia*, K Blood;
- *Field Guide to the Wildflowers of SE Australia*, J Galbraith (Book 2);
- *Flowering Natives for Home Gardens*, D Grieg;
- *Greening of Gondwana*, M White;
- *Growing Australian Native Plants*, A Blomberry; and
- *Winning the War on Weeds*, M Wolff.

Do we have a librarian for 2011?

Trigger Plants

*Mark Henley

The common name Trigger Plant (*Stylidium*) comes from the plants' method of pollination. A tube containing the style and 2 anthers is usually bent back below the flower. When an insect lands on the centre of the flower, the tube jumps up to strike the insect, covering it with pollen, which it then takes to another flower. The "trigger" usually resets itself within about 20 minutes. *Stylidium* is a fairly common perennial herb found in heath and open forest on sandy soils. The flowers are pink, in a terminal spike at the end of a tall stalk. One of these trigger plants is *Stylidium productum*. The photos below were taken near Bob Turner Track, Colo Heights.

*Mark Henley is a member of APS Newcastle Group.



Stylidium productum



Trigger plant flower close-up

Photos: Graham Prichard



Ed. A very common Trigger Plant found in The Hills is *Stylidium graminifolium*.
Photo : G Warn

Successful Rutaceae (Part 2) Betty Rymer

Remember that Betty began last month by saying, “My soil is Wianamatta shale over large sheets of sandstone rock and good soil grows big trees.”

Betty proceeded to list the Rutaceae that grow well in her garden, listing *Correa bauerlenii* (Chef's Cap), *Philotheca myoporoides* (syn. *Eriostemon myoporides*), *Boronia pinnata*, *Boronia heterophylla* and *Phebalium squamulosum*.

Boronia

There was inadequate space to comment on the unusual WA Brown Boronia, *B. megastigma*, (pictured last month) which has a beautiful scented aroma and is sometimes called the Melbourne Boronia because it grows so well down there. Unfortunately it is usually short lived in our area like so many other Boronias. One wonders whether it may be grafted successfully to *B. clavata*. Does anyone know?

And while *B. mollis* grows in my garden naturally and in The Hills bushland in sandstone areas, this is another that is very difficult to cultivate. Again one wonders if grafting may be the answer.

Zieria

The plant for which there was simply not space last month was *Zieria* 'Pink Crystals' which is now said to be a hybrid of *Z. cytisoides* and *Z. laevigata*. It grows easily and flowers well and is long lived. It can reach 1m x 1.5m with glossy, dark green leaves. The flowers are small starry, pink ones produced in profusion.



Zieria 'Pink Crystals'

All these plants that Betty has listed survive on rainfall once established.

Crowea

Editor

One genus to which Betty has not referred is the Crowea that grows best on sandstone, including in The Hills. Betty's soil is a little too heavy. There are two eastern species, the *C. exalata* and *C. saligna*, both of which grow around Sydney, the former generally to the south and the latter generally to the north. However their ranges just overlap and some splendid hybrids arise in the bush. Fred and Norma Johnson had some brilliant hybrids that propagated naturally in their Dural garden. We have been fortunate to have some grow in our garden too.

Betty concludes, “Maybe this will start members talking. I'm sure the answer to many queries about growing natives is:-

- What is the soil like?
- What is the aspect – sun, shade, wind?”

Ed. A successful Group is one in which the members talk about their successes and failures and learn from fellow members, by their own experience and from the advice of experts.

And Jennifer Farrer has obliged! Let's hear of your experiences with these beautiful but sometimes difficult plants too. They are among my favourites.



C. exalata

Photo: Brian Walters



C. saligna

Photo: Brian Walters

RUTACEAE IN THE HILLS Jennifer Farrer

Here are some more thoughts about plants in the Rutaceae family. As I spend a lot of my time walking around The Hills bushland reserves, I probably see more of these plants growing in the bush than in gardens

One of the distinctive traits of plants in the Rutaceae family is the oil glands in the leaves which give them such a pleasant aroma when you brush against them or crush the leaves in your hand. Probably the strongest smelling leaves are found in the *Zierias*. I have the prostrate *Zieria* growing in my garden. It is quite a rare plant in the wild but we have propagated it successfully from cuttings at Bidjiwong Nursery. Also growing in my garden and quite common in the local bushland is *Zieria smithii*. You can see it growing profusely at Hunts Creek Reserve in Carlingford. It also grows at Fred Caterson Reserve along Cattai Creek but the plants are more scattered.

The local *Correa* is a green flowered variety of *Correa reflexa*. You can see them in Bidjigal, Hunts Creek and Fred Caterson Reserves. The flowers tend to blend in with the leaves so it is easy to walk past them without noticing them. Like Betty, I have *Correa bauerlenii* in my garden but I also have a number of pink and red forms of *Correa reflexa* some of them self sown. A more unusual plant is a *Correa* which has yellow flowers and is really thriving.



***Correa reflexa* (Green form)**

Photo: Brian Walters

My favourite Rutaceae genus is *Eriostemon*. This is now somewhat depleted as so many plants have now been reclassified as *Philotheca*. *Eriostemon australasius* remains. This can be seen in Bidjigal Reserve in early Spring and what a wonderful show it is. There is no other plant in the Sydney bushland with such delicate pink yet large showy flowers. I have grown it successfully in the garden but it seems to have a

“use by date” of seven years. We have propagated a white variety at the nursery (from Pip Gibian’s garden).



Eriostemon australasius

Photo: Brian Walters

As mentioned above *Eriostemon buxifolia* and *Eriostemon myoporoides* have been transferred to the *Philotheca* genus. *Philotheca buxifolia* flourishes along the fire trail at the end of Cranston’s Road in Dural. There is a plant which has always been in the *Philotheca* genus growing at the end of Jones Rd Kenthurst. I think it is *Philotheca salsifolia* as it has mauve flowers which as you can imagine are very attractive.

One of the harbingers of Spring in the local bushland is *Boronia ledifolia*. The flowers usually start to appear at the end of June. You can usually see some in Bidjigal Reserve but it really stars in Kenthurst in lots of places such as the fire trail at the end of Jones Rd, along the Porters Rd fire trail and also the fire trail at the end of Murray Park Rd. This beautiful plant which grows so well on thin sandy soil does not like the care and attention it receives in the suburban garden and usually rewards any TLC by dying.



Boronia ledifolia

Photo: Brian Walters

When watering is necessary, give plants a good soaking to get down to the deeper roots and water less frequently – it’s better for your plants and it’s less waste and less costly. Water retention crystals are a great way of helping through summer. They should be mixed into the soil or potting mix.

Helpful Plant of the Month by Christine Coe

Angophora costata

Common names: Sydney Red Gum, Smooth Barked Apple



Angophora costata (Sydney Red Gum)



Lorikeet at Home in Sydney Red Gum

Photos: Jacquie Hickson of Friends of Lane Cove NP and Christine Coe

Description: The Sydney Red Gum is a tall, evergreen tree, which can grow to 30 metres. It has smooth bark which changes colour each year in late Spring when it sheds in large flakes. The new pinkish- brown or orange-brown bark matures to grey through the year. Also in late Spring and Summer many clusters of sweetly scented cream flowers appear at the ends of branches, attracting scores of birds and insects. There are often stains of dark red exuding from the bark. This is the tree's 'kino'. The limbs have wrinkles and folds. The bright green leaves are up to 17cm long, thin and pointed. New leaves are

bright red. Although called a 'gum', there is no cap over the flower bud and so it is not really a 'gum' tree at all. The seed capsule has ribbed sides; also different from gumnuts. It was called the Sydney Apple in colonial days because the leaves and flowers reminded people of the apple trees back home in Europe.

Habitat: An intriguing feature of this tree is that it can be found growing from cracks in rocks because it does not need deep soil. It can live in many habitats from wet valleys to dry hilltops. It is common on sandstone.

Why is this plant helpful?

The rich coloured timber is still used for making items such as bowls and dishes. In earlier times it was often used to carve tobacco pipes. The tree is a valuable source of pollen for bee keepers. The leaves and bark have been used for dying materials.

Almost from the beginning of the Sydney colony, 'kino' from eucalypts and angophoras, were in regular use. It was administered to treat diarrhoea as it adhered firmly and kindly to the mucous membranes of the gut. The roots of some species of *Angophora* were a source of water for Aborigines, who knew the best and easiest places to dig. Fortunately this timber is rarely milled as the wood has a twisted grain and many gum veins.

Fauna

Holes in this tree's dead branches provide homes for parrots and possums. Honeyeaters enjoy the nectar. New Holland Honeyeaters and the Musk, Little and Purple Crowned Lorikeets visit this tree for its nectar. The King Parrot eats the seeds from the tree tops.

Want to try a small one?

Dwarf Angophora, *Angophora costata* 'Little Gumball', is a hybrid gum never known to flower. Found 14 years ago as a chance seedling in a garden in Frankston, Victoria, it has proved to be an excellent small, multiple-trunked tree. At 3 to 5 metres tall but slow growing, its new leaves and its new bark are red and pink to orange-red. Little Gumball likes full sun or part shade and plenty of water in summer. Cumberland Forestry is listed as a seller.

Reference Books:

Burnum Burnum's Wild Things
Australian Medicinal Plants, Lassak and McCarthy
Wild Food in Australia, A B and J W Cribb
A Photographic Guide to Trees of Australia, Denis Greig
The Australian Bird Garden, Pizzey
Birdscaping Your Garden, Adams
Australian Plants for Year Round Colour, Angus Stewart
Attracting Wildlife to Your Garden, Roger Elliot

Website:

Burkes Backyard: Top Ten Gum Trees

MUOGOMARRA NATURE RESERVE

APS Hunter Valley Group, Graeme Mee (editor)

In September we (APS Hunter Valley Group) plan to visit Muogomarra Nature Reserve. Muogomarra Nature Reserve contains an amazing diversity of plants and animals and is open to the public just six weekends a year in August and September. At Muogomarra you can experience one of Sydney's most vibrant natural floral shows, including native orchid, bright pink Eriostemons, purple Boronias and towering Gynea lilies.

In fact at this time of the year and throughout spring is a great time to visit the sandstone country between Sydney and Newcastle. There are many short and long walks in national parks such as Brisbane Waters & Kuringai Chase where you can walk along tracks bordered by Boronia, Eriostemon, Grevilleas, Hibbertia, Waratahs, Woody Pears and many other species of magnificent flowers.

Below is a typical bush track through Brisbane Waters National Park with beautiful pink Boronia bordering the track.



Typical bush track through Brisbane Waters National Park

Boronias that can be found include *Boronia thujona* which has strongly scented leaves and likes moist shaded gullies, *Boronia pinnata* and the beautiful Native Rose, *Boronia serrulata*.

You will find many heath-like plants which are members of the Epacridaceae family. *Epacris longiflora* is a straggling shrub with beautiful tubes of red and white flowers that is often found in sheltered, well-drained positions near rocks.

Epacris microphylla is an erect, wiry shrub with white flowers growing up the stem and is generally found in moist areas. *Woolfsia pungens* is another very common member of the family found in heath areas. The plant below is *Sprengelia incarnata* which is widespread and grows in wet or swampy areas on sandy soil.



Sprengelia incarnata

Photo: Brian Walters

Two of the most spectacular plants that are regularly found in the areas around Sydney are Waratahs and *Eriostemon australasius*. Although other Eriostemons have been reclassified as Philothecas, this magnificent plant has not been renamed. It has beautiful pink flowers and is a stunning sight in the bush.

Grevilleas are also well represented in the sandstone country. *Grevillea sericea*, *G. buxifolia* and *G. linearifolia* are very common and widespread whereas *G. caleyi* and *G. shiressii* are quite rare and only found in small areas. The plant below is *Grevillea speciosa* which is a bushy shrub with stunning red flowers.



Grevillea speciosa

This is from the APS Hunter Valley newsletter of Aug 2010.

Ed. Do we have a member who would consider leading a similar walk for our Group in the Spring? We may need to be sure that we will not spread Myrtle Rust!

MY HAKEA IS 35 YEARS OLD!

Hakea bakeriana F. Muell et Maiden

*Hugh Stacy

First described in a joint paper by Ferdinand von Mueller and Joseph Maiden in 1893, this plant grows in a limited area on the northern side of Sydney, mainly north of the Hawkesbury River, in open woodlands generally on the coast and adjacent ranges.

The type specimen was collected near a creek at Wallsend, west of Newcastle; it has been found as far south as the Glenorie district. My first sighting of *H. bakeriana* was in May 1974 at Doyalson, north of Gosford, where the Wyee road leaves the Pacific Highway, in an area then quite close to industrial development. Another occurrence was further north, where these plants, locally only about 60 cm high, covered windswept heathlands overlooking the Pacific Ocean at Catherine Hill Bay.



Hakea bakeriana (The 35 years old plant in flower)

Photo: Hugh Stacy

I will always remember that first view: bushy shrubs 1.5 m high and 2 m diameter, with mallee habit and multiple stems. Huge fruits to 7 cm long, 5 cm wide and 4 cm thick, were prominent low down. But the flowers.....! Firstly, I did not know the flowering season and so did not expect to find any; secondly, no botanical description does them justice. This is surely one of our region's finest wildflowers. Individual flowers are larger than those of other Hakeas and of many Grevilleas: the styles are more than 45 mm long, comparable with those of *Grevillea longistyla*. Flowers form in clusters of six on pedicels 10 mm long, all arising from a peduncle 3-4 mm long; the diameter of a cluster can exceed 10 cm, while profuse clusters along older stems make massed displays. Flowers feature gently coloured cream perianths from which the styles break free with shades of pink, gradually deepening with age. From that first collection I planted a seedling in 1975. It has grown steadily ever since in sandy loam 60 cm deep over sandstone chips 2 m deep, now measuring 3 m high and 4 m across. At one stage it had a lignotuber the size of a soccer ball, but this has now divided into two parts, both of which are contributing new growth as bright and fresh a green as any seen in a European Spring. Few if any of the present stems are original; they seem to reach a

natural limit at a height of 3 m and then tend to die back. The plant remained dormant and rather sparse a few years ago during drought, but seems to have benefited indirectly from the regular watering and application of cow manure and potash specifically to roses growing nearby.

The flowering season began in April this year; the buds expanded, showing off the perianth limbs as little green tops. Peak flowering was in mid May and June; there are some late clusters developing even now in August, low down on the stems only 30 cm high. [For those members wishing for a little more, I would direct you to Australian Plants Vol. 8 p295 and Vol. 9 p151, where Hugh wrote about local *Hakeas* in 1976 and 1977. – East Hills Ed.]

*Hugh is a member of APS East Hills Group and a Past President and Treasurer of our Society.

Friends of the Garden Program

Native Plant Propagation Workshop at the Bowden Centre, Mount Annan Botanic Garden, Tuesday 15 Mar, 10am-1pm

Carol Griesser and the Growing Friends will conduct a practical hands-on workshop covering the basics of native plant propagation. Find out how to store and prepare seeds for sowing. Learn about soil mixes and the best methods for striking plants from cuttings, including ground covers, small and tall shrubs. Come prepared with sharp secateurs, a hat and closed footwear such as joggers or leather shoes. All other requirements will be supplied. You will be able to take home helpful notes and your prepared plant material. As an optional extra, following the workshop enjoy lunch at *Melaleuca House* café in the Gardens. **Cost \$55, includes all materials and morning tea at 10am**

Autumn Plant Sale

Mount Annan Botanic Garden, Saturday 19 Mar, 10am-3pm

The Growing Friends have a large range of native plants for sale. Propagating conditions permitting, these will include *Banksia blechnifolia* – an unusual and decorative ground cover from WA producing pale woolly orange spikes in late winter/early spring; a prostrate form of the emu bush *Eremophila glabra*; the waxflower *Hoya australis* subsp. *australis* and a selection of grasses. As well there are *Correas*, *Grevilleas* and other *Banksias* and *Eremophilas*. **Bring a bag or box for your plants - Free after Garden entry**

Bookings essential for both – Tel (02) 9231 8182 or go to friends@rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au

It is a good time in the year to prune your plants if you haven't done it already – a month ago may have been even better. It will help to shape them and give them a better chance in the heat.

Propagation Group News Lesley Waite

It was with some trepidation that we went to our propagation group this month. After the longest heatwave on record, there was concern that many of our plants may not have survived. But I am pleased to report that they coped amazingly well. The automatic watering system was obviously able to counter the high round-the-clock temperatures. Only the soft tip cutting s that we put down last month -, *Dampiera purpurea*, most of the *Boronia serrulata* and a *Syzygium* cultivar, "Orange Twist" turned up their heels at what was, for them, too Herculean a task.

When we prepare our cuttings, we always scrape the bottom 5mm of the stem and dip in Purple Clonex for at least 5seconds before planting 6-8 cuttings in a wide, shallow container. This month we found a small percentage of the Grevillea and Banksia cuttings put down in August and October last year were forming calluses instead of roots. This is a reasonably common occurrence amongst hard-to-strike species. Our practice is to take these out, nick the callous, reapply the hormone and place them back in the pot. Eventually small roots form and they can be potted up into tubes.

Over the years we have put aside 'stock plants'- those plants that are particularly popular by way of being hardy and/or showy - so we can easy take seed or cuttings from them, again and again. Some species can be notoriously difficult to strike, but then there comes along a plant that breaks all the rules, and has reliable and consistent strike rate and perhaps some other good qualities as well. Those are the plants whose DNA you want to keep, and holding stock plants is the perfect solution. Our favourite stock plants are :-

- *Eriostemon australasius* Takes a while to strike, but then it thickens up well and has a beautiful large pink flower. Gorgeous sandstone species.
- *Pseudanthus pimelioides* Very attractive in spring with masses of starry white flowers. In high demand every time we have it.
- *Persoonia chamaepitys* Good strike rate, thick and lush stem growth, seems reasonably hardy. Wonderful pot or hanging plant.
- *Pultenaea elliptica* Not difficult to strike, but this is a particularly nice specimen, with terminal cluster of red/yellow flowers lasting a long time on the bush. Although known for being hardy, this plant is often overlooked. It's a mystery to us, because it is quite a showy specimen plant right through spring and summer.

Propagation is held on the second Wednesday of every month. We would love to see you there. Behind the carpark, Ted Horwood Reserve, Baulkham Hills. Entry from Renown Road. For any queries, call 9654 2146

Next Month's Activities in Your Native Garden

Lesley will begin a series of reminder articles in next month's Calgaroo – watch out for it.

And keep an eye open for Christine Coe's interesting and informative **Helpful Plant of the Month**. We see beauty but rarely consider how our friends in the garden and in the bush help us.

We have received several fine articles from Betty Rymer and some from Jennifer Farrer, two long time members of our Group. But any other article by one of our own members would be appreciated – why not as a start, "My Favourite Native" or "My Garden Problem". You may assist someone else or receive a helpful suggestion .

An Unusual Kennedia

The pea-like flower pictured below shows the unusual *Kennedia nigricans* – black with a yellow throat. It comes from southern WA but is easily grown in our area. Like other species of Kennedia, this is a rampant twiner. It's leaves are glossy green and divided into three leaflets, another characteristic of the genus. Propagation is easy from seed following pre-treatment to break the physical dormancy provided by the impervious seed coat. Pre-treatment can be carried out by abrasion or by the use of boiling water – as with other legumes including Acacia. Cuttings strike well using firm, current season's growth.



Kennedia nigricans

Photo: Pat and Ross Carlton of APS Hunter Valley Group

We promised that we would not overload anyone this year. So I ask all members to contribute as they can – please help if you see something that needs to be done at a meeting or other activity and you can manage. Just turning your own chair around or giving someone a hand to position a table will help. And returning things after a meeting would be welcomed. Thank you.

Hydroponic Flannel Flowers – The Lana Mitchell Story

*David Crawford

Lana Mitchell's efforts in raising awareness of the native flower industry, and in building her own enterprise, were recognised when she won the 2010 NSW Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) Rural Women's Award. The Gundaroo mother of two established a hydroponic native flower nursery five years ago, and now hopes her promotional efforts will help expand the Australian cut-flower industry. Returning from overseas Lana looked for a business opportunity, she was drawn to the horticulture industry and found demand lay in native flowers. Without any formal training, but with enthusiasm and drive she has built an innovative business and is actively involved in promoting her industry. RIRDC had undertaken research on wildflowers and Lana used this to help map out her operation. Strong performance in field trials led her to a variety of flannel flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*) known as "white romance", which, she says, can withstand cold, and are easy to grow. With two unheated greenhouses totalling 720 square metres and 1500 plants, the then 36-year-old started her business in 2005. The greenhouses helped protect the plants from harsh winters but Lana also wanted to try something new for the industry - hydroponics. Nobody had grown flannel flowers hydroponically, there were no books or trial results to guide the way. "I had to work it out and in the process I killed thousands of plants," she said. "I had a hard year. I just kept going back to people who grew flannel flowers and those who used hydroponics. I put it all together until I got a beautiful crop in 2006." Her persistence was based on the knowledge that hydroponics would provide everything a plant needs. "You can get superb growth," she said. Now about 4500 plants are being lovingly cultivated, with room for another 3000 or 4000.



Lana Mitchell with some of her plants



Hydroponic flannel flower production

Lana Mitchell is actively involved in the industry as:

- a grower
- a board member of Wildflowers Australia,
- a member of RIRDC's Wildflowers and Native Plants Advisory Committee
- a member of the New Rural Industries Australia Interim Management Committee
- Editor of the "Australian Flower Industry" magazine, the quarterly trade magazine for the cut-flower industry in Australia, with a readership of over 3000.

Lana has instigated and implemented a number of projects to build the industry, including;

- a project to ensure Australian wildflowers are included on the TAFE floristry curriculums;
- a yearly national floristry competition to all Australian TAFEs and professional floristry schools; as well as
- a campaign to educate florists and consumers nationally on the availability and use of wildflowers
- organising national conferences and getting new people into the business of growing wildflowers commercially.

Lana's business is called Backcreek Country Enterprises and specialises in the propagation and cultivation of the Australian native Flannel flower (*Actinotus helianthi*) for the cut-flower industry both in Australia and abroad.

*David Crawford is the editor of the APS East Hills Group newsletter

Australian Botanic Garden - Mount Annan

Robin McIntyre, who volunteers as a Grower Friend at Mt Annan, informs me that the Mt Annan BG is now called Australian Botanic Garden - Mount Annan.